DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 352 UD 027 093

TITLE	Urban Update.
INSTITUTION	New Jersey State Dept. of Education, Trenton.
PUB DATE	Mar 87
NOTE	13p.; For related documents, see UD 027 092-094.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; Program Descriptions; *Program Implementation; Public Education; Remedial Programs; School Districts; *School Effectiveness; State Aid; *State School District Relationship; Student Needs; Supplementary Education; *Urban Education; Urban Problems
IDENTIFIERS	Effective Schools Research; *New Jersey Department of Education; New Jersey Public School Education Act 1975; *State Role

ABSTRACT

This report describes New Jersey's continuing efforts to help urban school districts comply with the state's Public School Education Act of 1975 in view of the particularly complex problems which the urban districts face in complying with the act's mandate requiring all districts to provide their students with a "thorough and efficient" education. The report is divided into four parts. A background section discusses the challenge of urban education and summarizes findings of effective schools research. "Activities on r Behalf of Urban Districts" outlines the following initiatives: (1) Department of Education reorganization including the creation of 11 Urban Specialist positions, the location of the Regional Curriculum Service Unit in an urban community, the creation of a Special Assistant to the Commissioner for Urban Education, and the appointment of an Urban Education Advisory Committee; (2) an Urban Education Seminar; (3) the Urban Initiative, comprised of the Broad Based Component and Operation School Renewal; (4) programs for urban dropouts; (5) vocational programs; (6) High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) summer assistance; (7) HSPT curriculum assistance, including Curriculum Alignment Workshops and HSPT Institutes; (8) compensatory education funding; and (9) a youth employment program. "Activities with Relevance to Urban School Populations" describes 16 additional policies, incentive programs, competitive grants programs, and conferences with particular application for urban school populations and problems. The final section consists of a brief conclusion. (AF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED312352

10/9/89 UD

New State Department of Education

Urban Update

Saul Cooperman
Commissioner of Education

Prepared under the direction of:

Valarie W. French, Ed.D.
Special Assistant to the Commissioner

New Jersey State Department of Education
225 West State Street
CN 500
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

March, 1987

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richard Vespucci
NJ State Dept of Education

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

UD 027 093

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

URBAN EDUCATION IN NEW JERSEY:
1987 UPDATE

Under the New Jersey Public School Education Act of 1975, local districts are required to provide their students with a "thorough and efficient" education. New Jersey urban districts, which serve 40 percent of our school children, face particularly complex problems as they endeavor to comply with this mandate. Because of the magnitude of the need, the New Jersey Department of Education has made a special committment of staff and funds to help the 56 urban districts improve the educational oportunities of the 400,000 students they serve. This report describes the continuing programs and special events developed by the Department to assist urban districts in planning and achieving educational goals.

BACKGROUND

During 1983, the Department of Education was reorganized to better respond to educational issues in New Jersey. The department defined its core mission as "continued educational improvement for all public school students in kindergarten through grade twelve." The local district planning process was strengthened and the monitoring process for local districts was streamlined and improved. New units of the department and a new system for coordinating curriculum services were established to deliver assistance to all districts.

The problems in urban districts affect all of the state's citizens. A well educated population is an independent and vigorous population, able to contribute to the continued growth and economic stability of the state. Thus, it is in the best interest of the state to seek aggressive solutions to questions of educational effectiveness.

Although it is clear that the primary responsibility for public education rests with the local district, the Department of Education has taken steps to answer the challenge of urban education and create positive alternatives.

The Challenge of Urban Education

Ten percent of the operating school districts in the state are responsible for educating 40 percent of the public school children. Problems that exist in all school districts are magnified in urban communities by the sheer number of people affected. Demographic analyses of the population show that there are more poor children, more poorly nurtured children, more children with special physical and emotional needs, more high school dropouts, more teenage parents, more unemployed youth, more deaths of children under the age of eighteen, and more crimes against children concentrated in urban centers. The conditions are critical, chronic enough to overwhelm most school administrators and reformers, and yet, education is the only proven remedy to the declining urban condition.

The conditions of the home and community affect planning, management and instruction in the schools. Urban schools report high incidences of disruptive behavior, chronic absenteeism, and below expected levels of student achievement. Indeed, the failures of students in New Jersey's urban schools are well publicized and cause for alarm. Educators do not control the environment in the homes or the community they serve, but they can, given assistance and information, control the learning environment of the school.

It is clear that urban students, like any other students, can learn and are learning in schools in New Jersey and across the nation. It is also clear that urban students must be held to the same academic standards applied to students in suburban and rural school districts. At the same time, recognizing the barriers to effective education in urban districts, more needs to be done to develop sound instructional programs, efficient assessment and evaluation systems, and a climate conducive to learning. The real challenge for urban education is not merely to recognize the social and economic problems but to find ways to insure that students excel.

Effective Schools Research

A relatively recent body of studies in education popularly referred to as the "effective schools" research describes characteristics of schools where students achieve. Generally, the studies report that students in the effective schools, compared to schools serving similar populations of low socio-economic status, achieve high scores in reading and math.

Where the student characteristics are similar, researchers hypothesize that factors in the school organization, personnel, climate or instructional program make the difference in achievement scores. While the conclusions and methodologies of these studies are not totally consistent, they do suggest a general pattern of characteristics that can be observed in effective schools.

- Strong leadership by the principal
- A clear set of goals shared by the staff
- Teacher accountability for student progress
- A collegial atmosphere and support for experimentation
- High expectations for student mastery of basic skills
- Time spent on academic tasks
- A school atmosphere that is safe and orderly, but not oppressive
- A tendency to structured learning activities
- A system for monitoring student progress

These characteristics have been observed most often in natural settings as an evolving response to the conditions of urban education. Issues of how best to replicate these findings for school improvement remain. The New Jersey Department of Education intends to help urban districts of the state apply the lessons of the effective schools research in our schools, to improve educational opportunity and increase student achievement.

ACTIVITIES ON BEHALF OF URBAN DISTRICTS

In keeping with its mission and in recognition of the special problems in urban school districts, the Department of Education has introduced programs and activities that are specifically designed to help urban districts ameliorate conditions and improve educational outcomes.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REORGANIZATION

To better define the particular needs of urban districts and respond to the special probelms of urban education, the department under Commissioner Cooperman has taken several actions.

Urban Specialists

Although by gubernatorial directive, department positions were reduced by seven percent during the 1982 reorganization, 11 new positions were created for Urban Specialists in county offices. These professionals work exclusively with urban districts to help resolve problems related to planning, monitoring and compliance.

Regional Curriculum Service Unit

The Regional Curriculum Service Unit - North (RCSU-N) was deliberately located in East Orange, an urban community, as an indication of the committment by the Department of Education to be accessible to urban districts.

Special Assistant to the Commissioner for Urban Education

This position, with direct access to the Commissioner, was created expressly to represent the perspective and investigate the special conditions of urban education within the broader spectrum of educational concerns and policies.

Urban Education Advisory Committee

The only standing committee appointed by the Commissioner, this advisory group serves as a forum for discussions of policies and practices that impact on urban education. Members, who include school administrators, researchers, parents, and business representatives, have contributed valuable insights and suggested ways the department can better serve urban districts in New Jersey.

URBAN EDUCATION SEMINAR

The first major curriculum project of the present administration was a seminar designed to bring information on effective urban school programs to New Jersey's urban educators. The three-day workshop in May, 1983 signaled the beginning of the department's focus on urban education, a focus that continues through new programs, products and seminars from the Department of Education.

URBAN INITIATIVE

Launched in 1984, this is a comprehensive, long-term effort of the New Jersey Department of Education on behalf of urban districts and, as such, it is unique in the nation. The Urban Initiative is an attempt to bring all of the resources and knowledge of the department to bear on urban school improvement.

There are two major components, the Broad Based Component and Operation School Renewal. The Broad Based Component uses a variety of approaches to provide help for 53 of the state's urban districts. Operation School Renewal is a more concentrated program to develop and implement comprehensive improvement plans in three urban districts. Operation School Renewal is in its third year of funding and the second year of implementation.

Broad Based Component

The Broad Based Component addresses ten objectives critical to improving educational delivery and student outcomes:

- improve reading skills
- improve writing skills
- improve math skills
- increase graduation rates of compensatory/bilingual students
- reduce the incidence of disruptive behavior
- increase jobs and diplomas for dropouts
- increase job placements for vocational graduates
- improve options for secondary special education students
- increase instructional uses of computers
- prevent and treat substance abuse

State department staff, primarily from the Regional Curriculum Service Units, provide on-going training and technical assistance to participating local districts in pilot projects, seminars and workshops. Seven of the objectives are addressed through pilot implementation projects: reading, writing, math, disruptive youth, bilingual education, substance abuse/prevention, computer education. Districts elect to participate in pilot projects after attending awareness forums, open to all 56 urban districts. Currently, the total number of pilot projects is as follows:

Reading	5
Writing	5
Mathematics	5
Disruptive Youth	3
Bilingual Education	3
Substance Abuse	10
Computer Education	3

Under the aegis of the Urban Initiative, the department also offers direct grants to interested districts for improvements in special education at the secondary level (5 pilots), graduation and employment rates among young dropouts (16 pilots) and vocational graduate placements.

Operation School Renewal

Three districts were selected by open competition for Operation School Renewal: East Orange, Neptune and Trenton. Operation School Renewal is designed to help these districts improve in five areas, identified by the Urban Education Advisory committee as "symptomatic of urban district problems":

- student attendance
- reading, writing, math achievement scores
- principals' effectivensss
- disruptive behavior
- youth employment

To help the three districts address these objectives the Department of Education awards grants to purchase consultants, equipment, and staff development training. One planned outcome of the initiative is substantive improvement in the districts; an equally important outcome will be a knowledge base on urban education improvement. To advance both outcomes, rigorous evaluation is an integral part of Operation School Renewal..

In the 1986-87 school year, the Urban Initiative office will offer seminars, mini-conferences and technical assistance emphasizing increased principals' effectiveness and stronger programs of basic skills instruction.

PROGRAMS FOR URBAN DROPOUTS

Because urban districts suffer higher dropout rates, the department funded seven experimental programs in the 1984-85 to provide basic education services to young (16-18 year olds) dropouts in urban areas. In 1985-86, two types of programs were funded at $1 million. One type of program provides instruction in preparation for the GED (General Equivalency Diploma) and includes personal counseling, career counseling and job-related services. The second type of program developed jointly by the Departments of Education and Community Affairs provides youth aged 16-21 with intensive basic skills instruction and employment opportunities through the New Jersey Youth Corps.

For the 1986-87 fiscal year, the Department of Education received $2.1 million from the state legislature to expand both types of programs and to increase the number of youth served to a projected 1,600. In addition, under the Job Training Partnership Act, local Private Industry Councils are offering employment and training opportunities to urban youth. As a result, sixteen urban districts are currently offering programs for dropouts.

VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Recognizing the problems the HSPT poses to urban vocational students identified as "high-risk" for graduation, the Division of Vocational Education implemented a program in the summer of 1985 for students who failed the HSPT. The program focused on remediation in reading, writing, and math and provided part-time employment for the students. In 1985 and 1986 the division funded county vocational schools to operate the program for students in Middlesex, Camden, Essex, Passaic counties.

For the 1984-85 year, the Division of Vocational Education funded 23 job placement counselors and four job developers in urban districts. In 1986-87, the division funds, totally or in part, 34 job placement counselors or job developers in urban districts. The division continues efforts to help districts increase the number of cooperative education placements and school-to-work apprenticeships available to urban vocational education students. There are also career guidance centers in 19 urban districts, 12 of which include computerized career guidance systems.

THE HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY TEST -- SUMMER ASSISTANCE

In the summer of 1986, the Department of Education awarded $1.5 million in grants to the 17 lowest performing districts in the state -- all of them urban -- to develop comprehensive remedial plans for students who failed the HSPT. For the summer of 1987, the department will award $2 million in grants to the 26 lowest performing comprehensive and county vocational school districts.

Districts use the funds to hire summer school teachers and to employ "at-risk" students in part-time summer community service jobs. In addition, the department through the RCSUs helps districts review test data for program planning and trains teachers in instructional strategies appropriate for teaching HSPT objectives and related skills in summer school and during the school year.

THE HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY TEST -- CURRICULUM ASSISTANCE

Because the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) is more rigorous than the Minimum Basic Skills Test (MBS) that it replaces, the Department of Education is concerned that urban students will experience difficulty in passing the test. Consequently, the department has undertaken a comprehensive effort -- the most ambitious in the recent history of the state -- to help urban districts prepare their students for the HSPT.

Curriculum Alignment Workshops

One role of the local district in the effort to raise standards and student performance is to make revisions in curriculum as called for to ensure that the skills tested on the HSPT are included in the instructional program. A total of 28 urban districts have participated in a special four day workshop on curriculum alignment between 1985 and 1987.

HSPT Institutes

Districts are encouraged to use the results of the annual testing program to identify deficiencies in curriculum or instruction. The RSCUs, in cooperation with the staff of the Division of General and Academic Education, prepared and delivered regional HSPT Institutes. In 1985-86 teachers from 50 of the urban districts learned how to use instructional materials and strategies developed by the the Department of Education to help students in grades 7-9 learn HSPT related skills. It is expected that teachers from 45 of the urban districts will participate in institutes again this year. Teachers from 5 of the largest districts will participate in department sponsored institutes in their districts.

COMPENSATORY EDUCATION FUNDING

Based on trial administrations of the High School Proficiency Test, large numbers of urban students were predicted to fail one or more parts of the test in 1986. Anticipating a critical need for remedial programs in urban districts, the Department of Education received over $48 million in state compensatory education aid in FY87 for these programs. This money is available in addition to the $110 million in state compensatory aid previously budgeted.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

The Department of Education has introduced a program to place 10,000 urban high school graduates in jobs between 1989-1992. The program "10,000 Graduates--10,000 Jobs" is designed to capitalize on the anticipated increase in the number of well-prepared graduates and the predicted growth in labor market demand. The program, operated by the Division of Vocational Education, will coordinate -- among employers, school and state agencies -- the placement of qualified high school graduates in full-time jobs.

ACTIVITIES WITH RELEVANCE TO URBAN SCHOOL POPULATIONS

The New Jersey Department of Education has introduced a number of policies, incentive programs, competitive grant programs, and conferences that have particular relevance for urban districts. That is, the targeted populations and problems are concentrated, although not exclusively found, in urban schools.

REVISION OF THE MONITORING PROCESS AND STANDARDS

The three-level state monitoring process defines elements of the school program that are integral to students' achievement and helps districts identify those elements in need of improvement. Districts certified at Level I are freed from annual reviews for five years to concentrate on local initiatives. Less successful districts receive assistance at Levels II and III in developing plans to raise programs to approved status. Plans are underway to allow for direct state intervention, as a last resort, in chronically deficient districts.

As of March 4, 1987, 563 districts have been monitored and 524, including 42 of the 56 urban districts, were certified at Level I. Because these districts will not be subject to state-level monitoring for five years, Department of Education staff have more time to devote to those districts working toward certification. There are, currently, 39 districts in the latter category including 14 urban districts. Of the 14 urban districts, 10 are in Level II (i.e., implementing plans to correct deficiencies) and four are in Level III (participating with department staff in extensive reviews of district deficiencies).

BILINGUAL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

The New Jersey State Board of Education faced an issue that had been avoided for years by adopting a set of graduation standards for limited speakers of English. The standard ensures the integrity of the state-endorsed high school diploma. The Department of Education is also developing Special Review Assessment materials and procedures in ten foreign languages as part of the plan to upgrade graduation standards.

CERTIFICATION OF BILINGUAL AND ESL TEACHERS

The Division of Compensatory/Bilingual Education has designed provisional teacher training programs for bilingual and ESL teacher candidates. The program was adopted by the State Board of Education in August, 1986.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION TRAINING INSTITUTES

Between 1985 and 1987 staff from 34 urban districts have attended regional Bilingual Education Training Institutes. The institutes are designed to help administrators and teachers improve planning, management, pedagogy and evaluation in bilingual and migrant education programs. Three urban districts are developing local site plans with assistance from the division.

BASIC SKILLS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PROCESS (BSPIP)

The Department of Eduaction offers interested districts the opportunity to participate in BSPIP. A thorough program review helps schools identify areas of compensatory education program improvement. To date,

staff from 22 urban districts have attended training sessions on the process. Eight urban districts have received on-site technical assistance for planning and implementation. Staff from urban districts also participated in a conference showcasing exemplary basic skills improvement programs.

BASIC SKILLS INCENTIVE PROGRAM

This program will reward basic skills programs that are exceptionally successful in remediating student deficiencies. Beginning in the 1987 school year, schools can apply for awards of up to $300 for each student above a baseline of achievement (set in 1986) who performs well enough to leave compensatory basic skills classes. The money can be used for innovative or support programs developed by the school. Although this program is open to all districts, urban districts with large populations of compensatory basic skills students, stand to gain the most from participation in this initiative.

ACADEMY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING AND MANAGEMENT

The Adademy offers professional renewal and help for educators who want to sharpen their instructional management skills. Of the 61 school teams accepted for the first training cycle in 1984-85, 13 were urban districts. For the 1986-1987 school year, teachers and administrators from 28 urban districts will participate in one or more of the Academy's programs. Four urban districts have requested and will receive assistance from Academy staff in designing local staff development programs.

REFORM OF TEACHER CERTIFICATION

Teacher certification standards have been revised and raised. At the same time, the Department has expanded the pool of talented, qualified teaching candidates available to local districts by introducing alternative route certification. In the 1985 and 1986 school years, 22 urban districts employed provisional teachers. An unanticipated benefit of this initiative has been an increase in highly qualified beginning teachers from racial/ethnic minority groups. Currently, 22% of provisional teachers are minorities.

MINORITY TEACHERS PROGRAM

Minority high school students who want to be teachers are eligible for a program of pre-college summer enrichment and state-backed tuition loans at a New Jersey college. The state will forgive loans to the graduates who teach in urban districs for four years. The GOVERNOR'S TEACHING SCHOLAR program offers the same loan forgiveness provision to New Jersey students in the top 20 percent of their class who plan to be teachers.

Taken together, these three initiatives to increase and improve the teacher pool have the potential to bring more, highly qualified minorities into education. Perhaps, more important, all students -- elementary and secondary, urban and rural -- will have increased opportunities to learn from strong, positive minority role models.

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Three regional educational technology centers have been opened as resources for teachers statewide. By design, at least 50 percent of the teachers trained in the centers are to be from urban districts. As noted under the URBAN INITIATIVE, eighth grade students and teachers in three urban districts are participating in a pilot project to use computers in basic skills remediation.

MATH/SCIENCE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

The 56 urban districts received federal allocations totalling $568 thousand in FY86 to improve instruction in science, mathematics, computer learning and foreign languages. In addition, 18 urban districts have received one or more grants from a total $84 thousand to improve curriculum and instruction in math, science, and thinking skills or to increase computer networking capabilities.

To inform and train educators in secondary science instruction, the Department of Education is funding a secondary science consortium. Twenty-one urban educators are involved in the project. Participants are trained in the information exchange and conferencing capabilities of computers, in the application of the technology and in new instructional content.

In order to improve achievement in mathematics a pilot algebra project has been funded by the Department of Education. Seven urban districts are involved in the project that trains teachers in the implementation of an innovative curriculum.

PROGRAMS FOR DISRUPTIVE YOUTH

To reduce student disruption in the classroom, the department is sponsoring a $1 million grant program that enables districts to create alternative programs for chronically disruptive students. Of the six awards, three were made to urban districts and two were made to consortia that include urban districts.

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS GRANTS

This program, funded by state legislation, provides $500 thousand and departmental assistance for selected schools. The grants are intended to help schools implement the findings of the effective schools research. The grant program encourages systematic efforts to link the findings of research on school effectiveness to research on the process of school improvement. Of the 15 schools that received awards, ten were in urban districts.

EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED

The department sponsored a statewide forum and regional workshops on gifted education. A specific focus of the sessions included programs for minority and disadvantaged students. In FY86, three urban districts received grants to implement and evaluate gifted education programs.

SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION GRANTS

In 1983, the Division of Special Education announced an initiative to enhance the development of secondary education programs and services for educationally handicapped students. The program is designed to improve handicapped students' achievement in basic skills and to increase their employment opportunities. Five urban districts, including the three Operation School Renewal districts, were among the 12 districts awarded grants in FY86.

STATE LIBRARY SYSTEM

Initiatives to upgrade libraries in urban communities were launched by the New Jersey State Library for the FY87 school year. Five urban library systems received a total $150 thousand to initiate adult literacy programs. Five urban school districts were among the ten districts awarded grants to improve library services to children and youth. These projects include Black History Month study guides, career information centers, and computerized lists of reference materials.

CONCLUSION

Urban schools, any schools, do not become ineffective or effective overnight. The needs of urban schools are complex, the problems pernicious. The New Jersey Department of Education has focused attention and resources on urban education by introducing comprehensive policies, services, activities and initiatives directed specifically to the needs of urban districts. In addition, by constant, uniform monitoring of the entire state public education system, the department is in a better position to develop new policies and design new programs that will benefit urban as well as suburban and rural districts. As a consequence, it is expected that many of the learnings from urban school improvement efforts will have generalizable and far-reaching implications for all students and all schools.

VF/kv:1/1225a